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Young People against Location in the Social Space and its Transgression Potentiality on the Basis of Collected Narrations

Abstract

This article contains the results of research carried out in order to establish the way in which young people perceive their own position and place in social space. The aim of this research was to define the way in which young people place themselves against and amongst others, concentrating mostly on transgression, e.g., an expansive way of location. The explorative research made it possible, however, beside such a way of location, which, as it turns out, is close to a small number of respondents, to expose a few other groups, for whom expansion into the social world is neither so obvious nor so close. The final part of the article includes an attempt to carry out the typology of such groups referring to the issue of solitude and loneliness.

Key words: *social space, solitude, loneliness, transgression.*

The undertaken subject is aimed at showing young people's opinions on how they perceive themselves, their role and, first of all, how significant they feel in creating and building relationships with other people. The phenomenon being the subject of the analyses and study results from the interest how young people interpret the significance of their own person in a specific social "performance" in which everybody adopts a role and if this "play" results in balancing profits and losses, thus providing relative satisfaction with maintaining relationships or if it results in solitude or loneliness.

From the pedagogical perspective, due to its ontological character, solitude is something natural and it is of ahistoric, acultural character. It is related to the

process of upbringing and development of man (Dubas, 2006, p. 330). The solitude of man growing up to “face life” and tasks may be revealed in this negative understanding, especially in extreme situations, or situations which are critical in nature or which are life turning points. Then the outcome may include a feeling of emptiness, axiological chaos in man, leading to spiritual solitude. This, following Halina Romanowska-Łakomy (2006, p.294), may be defined as existential emptiness arising as a result of a lack of relationships at the symbolic level.

Confusion in the sphere of one's own universals may always affect life trajectory, thus releasing the feeling of loneliness or solitude. As already established, solitude is embedded in man's fate and it gets embedded forever in the process of upbringing as well. This, however, taking its permanent nature, affects man's fate with a constant necessity of orbiting and choosing between what one may do and what one should do. Then a specific conflict arises which should be solved individually with all the consequences of the decisions one has made. The attitude towards a risk of loneliness is also revealed by means of the decision-making process and acceptance of the consequences of one's own choices.

Fortunately, “the corrective force” has for ever been embedded in the narrowly understood upbringing (Kunowski, 2007), which aims at “directing” and it may be stated that upbringing aims at elimination of loneliness, which is the source of trouble. With reference to appropriate development of man, actions aiming at recognition of symptoms of solitude become fundamental. It is also important to establish to what extent solitude as an “inherent attribute” still fulfils its developing function with the ability of transposition for creative and pro-developing energy and when it requires pedagogical prevention as it is no longer valuable for man.

Elżbieta Dubas (2006, *ibidem*) divides solitude into good and bad and – something in between – ambivalent, which stems from ambiguous and smooth perception of life situations. Analysing its reasons, one can list civilisation, environmental, which is related to the nearest environment, and internal factors. The latter include personality determinants such as listlessness, pessimism, passivity, cynicism, fearfulness or egotism. Zofia Dołęga (2006) also solves the problem focusing on the internal predispositions of man which are responsible for a stronger feeling of solitude. Unfortunately, due to numerous methodological, conceptual and ethical limitations, it is difficult to find an explicit answer in this scope. According to her, solitude should be defined as a state that is situationally or potentially characteristic.

If it is a certainty that solitude comes into the world with man's birth, it is worth focusing on the essence of breaking it, yet also on recognizing its symptoms. One of the acute forms of solitude is the one whose essence is based on “the lack of closeness with another man.” It has been defined as mental solitude (Romanowska-

Łakomy, 2006, p. 294). Bearing in mind the pedagogical value of reflection over the problem and cognitive exploration, attempts to reveal its potential symptoms among young people have been made. The background for further analyses includes the assumption of pre-conceptualization that the so-called “second modernity” implies certain specific difficulties in the scope of satisfying, good and close interpersonal relations, eliminating the risk of alienation and, at the same time, loneliness.

Consideration over young people’s tendencies defined as “from” and “to” closeness with other people and interpretation of their attitudes towards their own place in the social world will also boil down to an attempt to grasp the essence of such declarations, the quality of which can be defined following J. Koźielecki (2002) as transgression potentiality of persons, and thus, when they are close to declarations with a proactive (expansive) attitude towards the surroundings and “to” behaviours. Using J. Koźielecki’s notion and concept, it is also worth mentioning here that transgression in the meaning adopted by him is revealed as “*actions which consist in the fact that man consciously crosses the material, social and symbolic borders set so far, whereas his actions become “feats”*” (Koźielecki, 2002, p.43). Such actions are based on the attitude “*I know I am able to*” and I will be interested in symptoms of transgression potentiality, which, according to J. Koźielecki, are of private or ordinary character and, as stressed before, reveal the character of man’s relations with the surrounding, i.e., generally speaking, when there is a tendency to expand the scope of one’s own influence. The analysed space of this expansion shall limit itself to the social world, which is one of the possible areas for expansion (Koźielecki, 2002, pp. 66–67).

The methodological background of discussions on the subject matter of research

The deliberations assumed in this article have been set on the “frame” of the narrative concept of an individual. It assumes the necessity to comprehend man in connection and always only in reference to other people. Man is constantly “created”, and self-understanding depends on auto-narration, thanks to which one gets sense and meaning for one’s own actions. Narration is a “perpetuum mobile” of man’s being and knowledge about oneself as well as understanding who one is and where one intends to get. Narration is accomplished always in relations with other people, context, “here and now”. Its subject actively and creatively constructs it. According to the constructionalist perspective, identity is variable, dynamic and constitutes the outcome of relationships with other subjects. In the context of

the narrative perception of identity there are questions about the basics of cohesion of this hybrid structure, especially when the contemporary man is set in the context of strongly marked processes of individualization, in which self-control, "body privatization" (Abriszewski, 2006 p., 205 following Bauman, 1995, p. 87), net relationships, atrophy and erosion of close relationships become essential. Thus, the basic question which I will try to provide a general answer to in this thesis concerns the following problem:

How do young people place themselves in the social space?

Among other things, the research is an attempt at discovering if, in a situation when some universals such as social bonds collapse, people taking part in the research refer to other people in their narrations and what character these referrals have. Beside the qualitative interpretation and typology of statements revealing transgression potentiality, an attempt will be made to select the collected narrations according to the genuineness of metaphors and analogies the people participating in the research made for their own narrations. Using a metaphor justifies the meaning which is given to it. A metaphor is not only the result of abstract thinking, but as, e.g., Antoni Krzywka says (2008) following Georg Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1988) (cognitive theory of metaphor), its functions boil down to ordering the world, satisfying the need to understand oneself, relations with others and obtaining "coherence" in the scope of past, current and future life experience (Krzywka, 2008, p. 14, following Lakoff, Johnson, 1988, p.25). In this understanding a metaphor is an indicator of the ability to reason. A metaphor, as A. Krzywka says, is used for familiarising what is strange and this is achieved as it contains what is "strange in one's own" and "one's own in strange". Therefore, it requires broad embracing of the area of comparison, getting to know what is strange and penetrating oneself. These are the aspects of a metaphor which show its usefulness, but a metaphor is also an indicator of the ability to think creatively, a means of expression, a sign of onomastic creativity and linguistic productivity. By bringing these aspects closer I will try to grasp the attitude of the persons to or against their own situation in the social space.

Description of research model and procedures

The research was of explorative character and was aimed at reconstruction of the significance the persons participating in it attribute to the surrounding (subjectively perceived social space) and establishing the quality of relationships they experience in contact with other people. In order to do so, some texts written by persons aged 20 to 25 were collected on the random basis. Based on the attitude of David Silvermann (2008,) a model of research was adopted, the function of which is directing the researcher on specific perception of social reality. The interpretative model constitutes the background for the research based on the analysis of texts coming from the persons taking part in it. A specific variant of qualitative research was adopted; it was established by E. Terhart (1997), who defined it as communicative and explanatory research and referred here following E. Paprzycka (2008, p. 134) as one of three. In this formula the researcher is in the position of “strange” in order to grasp all these things which are beyond the awareness of the persons undergoing the research. The material being the background to the research includes some texts provoked by an open question (statements, narrations) focused on the phenomenon of placing oneself against other persons. “Other” has not been precisely defined here. In the research, a documentary method was used, the characteristics of which I provide following Danuta Lalak (2010). The author writes about this method in the following way: *it recognizes the constructionalist character of reality – the world is what it becomes. Studying it we have to deal with two categories of interpreters – daily (participants of the research – normal people) and scientific (researchers)* (Lalak, 2010, p. 278). The researcher adopts the role of an observer and does not differ much in his/her perception of reality from the participants. The documentary method has the character of “second degree” observation consisting in conceptual and theoretical reconstruction of pre-theoretical, theoretical and metaphorical knowledge (which the persons undergoing the research have) being the effect of “first degree” observation performed by participants themselves. This method consists in a comparative analysis of groups and examination of orientation samples by means of a genetic analysis of social processes. *What the participants talk about is not analysed with particular attention, yet experiences, feelings, habits and attitudes documented in descriptions are important here. The evaluation of interpretative authenticity which is provided is not important here but the definition of the probability of occurrence of the observed orientations in the context of communicated structure of experiences.* (Lalak, 2010, p.278, following Bohnsack, 2001). The persons undergoing the research, as D. Lalak further says, define “the semantic pattern” but it is beyond any theory which is

based on the structures of popular thinking. This is the knowledge which requires deciphering and working out and then being composed in a defined theoretical frame. Following the main theoretician of this method, Ralf Bohnsack, D. Lalak describes four stages of interpretation of the empirical material:

1. Forming interpretation – thematic selection of a given topic and summary
2. Interpretation by reflection aimed at working out semantic frames and then comparative juxtaposition of main topics of discussion
3. Case study – defining a field for collective experiences in the environment which the participants represent, often expressed metaphorically, helping to notice otherness or commonness.
4. Building types – with the intention to define what is typical (Lalak, 2010, pp. 280–282, following Bohnsack, 2001)

The empirical material discussed in this article shall be analysed following individual stages, yet some texts (stages of interpretation) shall be integrated.

Location of young people among others – forming interpretations

The statements analysed in this part provoked by an open question: How do you place yourself among other people and quote the metaphor most appropriate to the sense and statement, best showing your personal reflection. The collected statements constitute expression of personal experiences and their interpretations focused on how participants “feel” and perceive their own position against other people, strangers or persons well-known and close to them. This is the sequence people used when they referred to the concept of “other”/“others”. This question or topic around which the participants built their statement often had a metaphor or more complex sentence, the function of which was to “specify” or “label” one’s own opinion. This aim resulted from the assumption that thanks to it the person making the statement will try and look into him/herself and thus will get closer to him/herself.

Location of young people among others – interpretation by reflection and field of collective experiences on the basis of participants’ statements

At this stage the main topic of discussion has to be selected; in this case these will be statements made by the persons undergoing the research in order to reveal

its “direction”. This is an element necessary to carry out a comparative analysis and select potential “contrasts”. Selection of defined types will be the final sequence of this process. Having this in mind, I will try here to expose directions and orientations of young people on their own position among others, basing on the contents of their statements and referring to their short fragments which will help document these reflections. Due to the need for synthetic coverage of this article, only some of them will be referred to.

The analysis of empirical material allows us to note that among the statements the ones that may worry predominate. There are some statements whose authors explicitly express fear, anxiety, reluctance towards others and similarly perceive the attitude of others towards themselves. Such persons feel alienated and others (most often strangers) are seen as false and insincere. It may be deduced from the statements that young people often feel specific discomfort among others. The following statement is a good example:

I feel strange, cornered, and imperceptible. I feel different from others, who fix me with a piercing gaze... Another statement with a similar expression: We meet other people around us (...). Each of them has their own world and we appear in their world accidentally and only for a few moments. If this is so, it means that man is left to himself in his life (...). This opinion is quite nihilistic in nature and it is an example of statement (one of many similar ones) somehow marked with resignation or passivity. The author of a similar text says: In a group each individual has his/her own role which he/she has to play. As part of this group I have a passive attitude adapting to the rules set by others. Although I not always agree with them, I submit to the impulse of a crowd, the majority. This attitude stems from general alienation rather than from innate shyness. My behaviour is dominated by poses learnt over the years and these poses take control at nearly every meeting. The freedom of behaviour is limited once the group I belong to gets bigger. The bigger it is the more uncomfortable and reluctant I feel, even though I do not isolate myself socially.

Can we, bearing in mind the author’s declaration stated in the last sentence, regard this attitude as positive and proactive? Rather not. This statement may also be interpreted as a signal and sign of helplessness toward lack of transparency in human relationships and difficulties in confronting them. The person who gave the following answer expressed it even more forcibly:

When you are alone you do not resemble the person you become among other people. Your behaviour changes diametrically. Suddenly you feel that you do not have to behave,

give opinions or think appropriately. It is so as if in one's own self there were two different spheres. And it is not because we have been programmed like this but because "the virus of our culture" requires this from us. It turns out that without a mask you cannot survive. So you put on your mask and run to the crowd of other false masks – to promote your favourite monkey Self. An individual in society means constant switching over from the mode of jungle, success, plastic to the mode of home, sincerity, joy.

Persons from this group often perceive themselves in the category of persons being somehow "against" the rest of the world, facing other people who are strange, "promoted" and co-creating or legitimizing the state of "mask culture." A mask, according to them, is an inseparable attribute of contemporary man. One has to "put it on" whenever one meets others. Everybody has a mask, and this mask chafes, but the mask loses its *raison d'être* among the closest persons.

The necessity to put on masks to protect oneself from others is treated by some persons as "necessary evil" imposed by *the virus of contemporary culture*. It determines the understanding and feeling of the position and place of persons giving their opinions as well as of the warped quality of their relationships with others. On the other hand, the identity created every day – suited to or dependent on the creation of the encountered persons seems to be treated as "the good" an individual may possess:

What I am like among others depends on who these "others" are. I never feel confident with strangers but I never let them know about it. I put a mask on and I pretend to be confident and decisive. I do not let them enter my world. What do I reach? I feel safe having control over what they know about me. I cannot afford to show my real feelings as I am afraid of humiliation. I am afraid to be rejected so it is difficult for me to develop relationships with others. With the closest persons I do not pretend to be somebody who I am not.

Some of the collected statements are marked with ambivalence. These statements contain texts showing some hope and optimism or faith in healing and leaving the social isolation by means of contact with other people, yet these persons show hesitation, declare being lost and show a feeling of anxiety. Below there are some statements classified as such:

Day by day I get more and more lonely and thus I look for all sorts of contact with other people. I have a constant impression that I do not fit anywhere and this is not my place. I observe others, analyse their life, behaviour and constantly compare them to myself.

I often run into the world of dreams and memories. Even though I want to be among people I am still lonely, unnoticed and ignored. My life looks normal for them. (...) I am afraid of this awful solitude which I already feel and which may be even greater. I am close to my nearest and dearest. And other: When among others I often feel as a little valued member despite the good opinion which I have. I feel worse, less educated and less attractive. I am afraid of the opinions other people have. Even though I am attracted to people, I do not like being alone since I often feel bad with myself.

Apart from the above-mentioned statements of the persons who place themselves next to or even beyond others, there are also statements of the persons who are expressly aware of their need to be with other people, not dividing them as strange or close, and clearly defining their role. In the statements of these persons it is difficult to find symptoms of any pressure, fear or helplessness. Such persons are perceived as handling the “dimorphic”, i.e. two-personal, character of relationships with others. They are aware of their own input, yet they can profit from what others have to offer. They show a proactive attitude. Such persons clearly define their role, explicitly declaring a belief in parallel relationships with others. They show their awareness of influencing others. This is what the author of such a statement says:

If it is easy to be an observer of relations with other people against oneself, then it is more difficult to objectively place oneself among other people. Personally, I can define myself as an active participant in social life. And in the world I am to live in. The surrounding reality delights me and people fascinate me. The variety of characters, diversity of attitudes towards some issues, multitude of opinions, thoughts and beliefs make me feel a kind of insatiability related to getting to know the other person. I like observing people – busy and concerned, joyful and sad, young and old, educated and those on the train, in the street, on a bench, in church. I like talking to them, making casual acquaintance, exchanging a few sentences with a stranger and this often means much more to me than long dialogues with predictable people. (...) People inspire me, enrich my inner life, being with them brings joy and gives me the feeling of complete humanity. However, they have a didactic role in my life – teach me how to live and warn me against taking inappropriate steps.

(...) The “me-others” relations are often aloof. Pride, vanity, desire of success, insatiable ambition, unconditional pursuit to meet one’s material needs, hatred and greed contribute to the fact that I look at many people with reserve. They are also fascinating, as with their actions, they make me aware of how far man is ready to go to realize his goals. Of course, I try to place myself among others but I cannot overlook the aspect of bipolarity of these relationships. I also have some influence over them – how others

perceive me, how they assess my actions and how far I influence their life determine the picture of me in their eyes. Solitude for such persons is probably a quality and they create it for their own needs: Each man is different; each man looks at the world in a different way and perceives it in a different way. I am an average person and do not stand out among others. I never start relations on the Internet; I prefer face to face contact. I am sociable, I like people, I try to listen to them and concentrate on what they say. I like being with people as I feel good among them, but I feel best with my own friends. Being in a group I get my self-confidence back, I feel at ease and better. Sometimes I have days when I need peace and quiet and then I like being alone. Constructive relations with others and proactive location in the social space are certainly more typical of people who are self-confident. This position may be supported by the following statement: I like the company of others, I easily make new contacts and I am not afraid of people. I feel good in multicultural environments, I speak two languages very well. (...). Sometimes I like taking initiative and leading. I know I am accepted and popular, but unfortunately many people do not understand my manner and values. I know that some of my behaviours are different from normal, yet for me they are normal.

Unfortunately, such an unambiguous statement is unique in the whole collection.

Location of young people among others – an attempt at typology

The aim of this part is to define general tendencies in statements of the persons participating in the research and to categorize the statements in the following way: with transgression potentiality, the opposite of it and ambivalent. Among the metaphors and sometimes sentences which were used to sum up some statements, the following ones tend to be most distinctive: “foreigner”, “life in social back office”, “window ajar”, or “rollercoaster” as the analogy to the changing world and discovering the world and people again and again. Transgression potentiality is not shown directly in many statements. There were not many people who were so explicitly “expansive” in their declarations.

The collected statements reveal specific reserve towards others. Young people in many cases feel alienated, not at ease and they often use the “mask” metaphor which obviously is associated with the perspective and drama concept of social life Erving Goffman (2008) wrote about. A mask is an inseparable attribute in the social world, however, people have different opinions on its functions. People may be divided into those who use it intentionally and deliberately. Superficiality of

relations with others is natural for them and they do not object to such reality. It seems that their location in the social space is defined by the mercenary attitude of a merchant who cannot lose but would like to gain or, in the worst scenario, can balance profits and losses. The persons defined in this way use the privilege of being among others, learning from others and showing pleasure in such contacts with others. Some of these statements show that such persons reveal the activity "to", which is typical of transgression or the feeling of "I know I am able to," and place themselves against others from a somehow "superior" perspective. According to them, finding one's own space among others requires careful observation of relations and control over situations. Consequently, such persons place themselves in the group of participants and therefore feel important for a wider social system and certainly for themselves as well. It seems that such persons are close to transgression location.

In other descriptions, declarations showing tendencies opposite to transgression, i.e. escaping, have been found. Such persons see themselves as members of society, yet they directly express their helplessness towards others. Such persons are perceived as standing "next to", waiting for the course of action. This is clearly shown in the metaphors quoted above as well as many statements which cannot be quoted here; short statements which are not marked with a precise Self as if it was transparent, invisible for others. On the basis of the statements one can also identify the persons who do not show any anxiety and it is difficult to find any ambivalence in their statements. These are the persons who are certain about their own value, showing symbiosis with others and profiting from being among others regardless of intimacy. As already said here, there are not many such persons and they are even an exception.

The research on this subject matter leads to some worrying conclusions, yet probably one should have expected such counterbalance. Consequently, four types of attitude/location of one's own person in the social space have been defined. Summing up, a transgression attitude is the rarest, then we can talk about the next one as mercenary; the third, defined as opposite to mercenary would be of philanthropic character, and last but not least, we have a transparent one.

This classification is based on type gradation, which is differentiated on the basis of the amount of reserve a person has to place oneself towards or against others. Consequently, each attitude and location may reflect the forecast risk of loneliness.

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